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Letter dated 1 April 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the Chairman's summary of the Second International Forum on Partnerships for Sustainable Development, which was held in Marrakech, Morocco, from 21 to 23 March 2005 under the High Patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI (see annex).

The Forum was organized by the Moroccan Ministry of Territory Planning, Water and Environment in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and other partners.

The Marrakech Forum was open to all stakeholders involved or interested in partnership initiatives and particularly to those partnership practitioners engaged in the day-to-day operations of existing water — or energy-related partnerships. A total of 500 representatives from Governments, intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the private sector participated in the Forum.

I would appreciate it if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the thirteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development under item 4 of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Mohamed **Bennouna**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 1 April 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Chairman's summary of the Second International Forum on Partnerships for Sustainable Development: Advancing implementation on water and energy

(21-23 March 2005, Palais des Congrès, Marrakech, Morocco)

Introduction

1. The Second International Forum on Partnerships for Sustainable Development was convened in Marrakech, Morocco, from 21 to 23 March 2005 under the High Patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI. The Forum was organized by the Moroccan Ministry of Territory Planning, Water and Environment in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and other partners.

2. Mr. Mohamed Elyazghi, Minister of Territorial Planning, Water and Environment of Morocco, chaired the opening session of the Forum, and Mr. Ahmed Ameur, Secretary-General of the Moroccan Ministry of Territory Planning, Water and Environment, chaired the closing session. Ministers and high-level representatives from Jordan, the Netherlands, the Congo, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America shared their countries' partnerships experiences as part of the opening session.

3. The Marrakech Forum was open to all stakeholders involved or interested in partnership initiatives and particularly to those partnership practitioners engaged in the day-to-day operations of existing water- or energy-related partnerships. A total of 500 representatives from Governments, intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the private sector, from over 60 countries, including 13 ministers, participated in the Forum.

4. The purpose of the meeting was to advance the implementation of sustainable development by strengthening and fostering water- and energy-related partnerships. In particular, the Forum focused on issues related to the partnering process.

5. The Marrakech Forum built upon issues discussed at the First International Forum on Partnerships for Sustainable Development (March 2004, Rome, Italy), which focused on enhancing the contribution of partnerships to implementing the goals and objectives of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development ("Johannesburg Plan of Implementation") (Jpoi),[a] adopted at the World Summit and other international agreements related to sustainable development. The World Summit had given formal recognition to partnerships as an important tool that contributed to and enhanced implementation of sustainable development goals. Over 200 partnerships for sustainable development were launched during the World Summit process. At present, about 300 partnerships for sustainable development are registered with the secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

6. In the context of the Commission on Sustainable Development, partnerships for sustainable development are defined as voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiatives contributing to the implementation of Agenda 21,[b] the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21[c] and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. However, as noted in the Marrakech Forum, there are a wide range of collaborative arrangements that can be called partnerships, ranging from consortia to networks, from local to international initiatives, and from formalized arrangements to looser informal structures.

7. Water- and energy-related partnerships for sustainable development are sometimes constituted in the form of public-private partnerships. The key differences between public-private partnerships and multi-stakeholder partnerships subsist at the level of their composition (public-private versus multi-stakeholder) and structure (contractual versus more flexible internal agreements). However, it is possible to find multi-stakeholder initiatives within a public-private partnership.

8. Above all, partnerships for sustainable development represent a way for all interested stakeholders — be they Governments, civil society or the private sector — to pool their energies and resources in tackling the challenges of implementing sustainable development goals in an interdependent globalizing world.

9. While the use of the partnerships mechanism as an instrument to help further on-the-ground implementation has been fairly long-standing, the acceptance of partnerships for sustainable development as a complementary outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development generated a growing interest in demonstrating that they contributed a concrete added value to the implementation of sustainable development goals. Some of the concerns raised in this regard at the First Forum held in Rome included the need for greater credibility, responsibility, transparency, accountability and tangibility of results in respect of these initiatives.

10. The Marrakech Forum focused on practical issues at the core of building and operating partnerships: internal governance structures, finding resources, and reviewing and measuring partnerships. These partnering process issues were discussed extensively using the specific experiences of partnerships working in the water and energy sectors.

Water and energy partnerships and the partnering process

11. The Forum highlighted key elements of partnerships for sustainable development related to water and energy and featured discussions on:

- Using innovative partnership approaches to overcome constraints on implementing water- and energy-related goals.
- Establishing new and strengthening existing partnerships, particularly in developing countries.
- Sharing lessons learned and best practices in the partnering process (for example, building, managing and resourcing partnerships, etc.).
- Providing networking opportunities and showcasing partnerships that work, inter alia, through a partnerships exposition and the innovative Marrakech Place.

Water partnerships

12. Seven sessions on water took place over the first two days of the Forum. These sessions provided an opportunity for water and sanitation partnerships from various regions to present specific cases and discuss key issues in a moderated round-table format. Fourteen different cases were presented by 17 partnership practitioners during these sessions.

13. These partnerships had several common goals, including:

- Improving access to sustainable urban and/or rural water and sanitation service delivery.
- Informing government policies related to water and sanitation.
- Facilitating transparency and participatory decision-making in the water sector.

14. The water discussions centred on identifying both challenges in the sector and ways in which partnerships could help overcome these challenges. The discussions on water partnerships related particularly to both public-private partnerships and multi-stakeholder partnerships. The challenges were primarily related to governance, financing, capacity-building, cost recovery and appropriate technology. Key lessons learned related to these challenges that emerged are highlighted below.

15. Concerning governance-related issues, it was recognized that while Governments had the responsibility to set policy (legal and regulatory structures), partnerships could legitimately inform such policy, provided that clear boundaries were established regarding the private sector's and civil society's influence for reasons of transparency and legitimacy. Partnerships that aimed to promote effective governance were able to:

- Promote recognition of the need for change and catalyse political will to act.
- Facilitate mutual understanding and equitable resolution of competing interests of partners (for example, access to services, cost recovery, affordability and profit).
- Foster trust, transparency and participatory decision-making in policy-setting related to land tenure, standard-setting, pricing/tariff-setting, serving the poor, community participation, and priorities for service expansion.

16. Financing lessons learned showed that partnerships could:

- Reduce individual investment risks for donors, the private sector, users and Governments.
- Leverage funding resources and strengthen funding proposals.
- Facilitate innovations in donor funding arrangements and the development of financing approaches such as franchising, partial loan guarantees, etc.

17. Water partnerships that aimed to build capacity at all levels could help to:

- Ensure longer-term institutional support.
- Mobilize a wide-range of stakeholders (the private sector, academia, non-governmental organizations).

- Increase technical and process skills (for example, the ability to carry out activities and level the playing field).
- Establish processes for defining goals and indicators and measuring capacity-building results.

18. Partnerships working to ensure cost recovery for sustainable service delivery were able to:

- Share information in such a way as to ensure that stakeholders understood the full costs of service provision (including production, treatment, distribution, sanitation and drainage, depreciation, maintenance and overheads).
- Facilitate acceptance of the fact that all costs must be accounted for so as to ensure service provision.
- Develop mechanisms for equitable distribution of the costs, including social tariffs, targeted subsidies and other mechanisms like microcredit and flexible fee collection, to support service access for poor households.

19. Related to the delivery of appropriate water and sanitation technology, participants noted the ability of partnerships to:

- Facilitate local-level participation in decision-making on appropriate technologies.
- Bring together complementary skill sets (research and development, finance, manufacture, market, distribution, etc.).
- Inform government policy and regulation able to drive innovation centred around technology that could increase access and reduce costs.
- Foster innovation and improve flexibility in the application of technologies without compromising accepted standards (for example, for water quality, safety, etc.).

Energy partnerships

20. Six sessions on energy took place over the first two days of the Forum. These sessions provided an opportunity for energy partnership representatives to discuss their ongoing partnerships, and the challenges associated with these initiatives. Seventeen speakers from government, the private sector and civil society shared their partnership experiences.

21. The partnerships discussed during the energy sessions had a common focus on delivering access to energy services. In particular, these initiatives are working towards promoting:

- Use of renewable energy technologies and systems.
- Use of energy efficiency technologies and systems.
- Use of cleaner fuels and sustainable transport systems.

22. The energy sessions focused on identifying key issues for partnerships in the sector and common challenges faced by these initiatives. In particular, the discussions focused on issues related to the end-users' development needs, the policy framework for energy issues, and the challenges faced in implementation of energy partnerships.

23. End-users' energy needs were discussed from the perspective of developing-country representatives who shared their views on what the goals and ultimate objectives of energy-related sustainable development partnerships ought to be. Specific points were raised on meeting the energy needs of end-users, namely, that:

- Poor people could and did pay for energy services — and often ended up paying more than other consumers.
- Engagement of local groups/communities in implementation was vital in ensuring that services reached the poor.
- Further mobilization of business for finance, technology and service delivery was required.

24. The policy framework for energy issues was discussed in the context of an overview of the key energy events that had taken place since the World Summit on Sustainable Development and how these related to the promotion of energy partnerships. In particular, it was noted that:

- Energy-related issues were at the forefront of policy discussions at a variety of forums ranging from the follow-up of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to the five-year review of the outcome of the Millennium Summit and the lead-up to the fourteenth and fifteenth sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development.
- The role of government in setting policy frameworks was key to creating an enabling environment.

25. During the course of the discussions, several common challenges faced by energy partnerships were identified. It was recognized that:

- Competing pressures — being inclusive (more stakeholders) versus achieving quick results (with fewer partners) — needed to be balanced.
- Greater exchange of information and more methods of communication were required.
- Greater clarity of incentives for government, the private sector, civil society and consumer groups was needed.
- Partnerships with complex and diverse membership required complex governance structures (which were time- and resource-intensive).

26. Several recurrent, unresolved issues for energy partnerships were also identified, namely:

- The common challenge of scaling up efforts and replicability of initiatives.
- The need for sustained funding and more sources of funding.
- Reconciling the voluntary nature of partnerships with concerns over accountability and monitoring.
- Uneven power relations among partners (non-governmental organizations/ donors/business).
- Different time-horizons for different partners.

The partnering process

27. Issues related to the partnering process, namely, building, managing, reviewing and sustaining a partnership, were emphasized throughout the Forum discussions. Two plenary panels led by experts in the partnering process provided an overview of the key issues related to partnerships as a method of collaboration. Participants in five breakout sessions discussed the partnering process issues related to water and energy partnerships. Financing and resourcing issues common to both water and energy partnerships were discussed in two separate sessions.

28. The discussions focused on the following key areas within the partnering life cycle: cross-sectoral linkages, internal governance structures, marketing and outreach, financing and resourcing, and evaluating and monitoring partnerships.

29. As most partnerships had partners from a wide range of stakeholder groups, this presented a challenge in regard to defining roles, the structure of the partnerships and communication between partners. Effective partnerships were seen to be those that focused on maximizing each partner's different capacities, competencies, networks and roles as creatively as possible so as to meet the partnership's goals. It was observed that by exploring the various challenges that each stakeholder (or sector) presented in a transparent manner, partnerships could:

- Reveal the underlying interests of each partner organization.
- Match one partner's weaknesses with another partner's strengths.
- Work on ways for the partners to work together constructively.
- Develop decision-making mechanisms for reaching consensus.

30. Partnerships employ a wide range of management structures, ranging from a formal board of directors to informal leadership groups organized by issue. While the internal governance structures varied depending on the needs of each individual partnership, certain common issues emerged. In this regard, it was recognized that:

- Clear, specific and realistic goals should be defined from the outset.
- Internal communication was critical to governance, as this created opportunities for partners to network and interact.
- There was a need to minimize the time spent on "managing partnerships" and maximizing the time spent on implementation.
- There were advantages to having third-party entities such as secretariats manage a partnership, with specific benefits including the perception of neutrality and the ability to leverage funding as exemplified by the facilitation of fund-raising targeting the private sector/donors.
- One size did not fit all and often there was an inverse relationship between the size of a partnership and the speed at which results were obtained.

31. Comprehensive and creative communication, both internally and externally, was seen as an essential part of the partnerships process. In this regard, it was recognized that:

- Internal communications were needed to enable sharing of information between partners, identify needs of various stakeholders, improve management and implementation and strengthen ownership.
- External communications were needed to enable sharing of information on experiences, attract other partners, and secure sustainable sources of funding.
- Outreach activities were a way to demonstrate quality and results and a key motivational element in keeping partners on board and securing the involvement of new partners.
- Information-sharing between partnerships was a means of avoiding duplication, and improving coordination among various initiatives.

32. Mobilizing and sustaining the resource base of partnerships was one of the challenges often cited by partnership practitioners. It was observed that at each stage of the partnering cycle, different resources were required. One strategy to meet these requirements was for partners to engage in a mapping exercise to determine what non-financial as well as financial resources each partner was bringing/committing, and how much could be achieved by partner contributions rather than contributions of non-partner donors. Participants were taken through a resource-mapping exercise in one of the breakout sessions. It was observed that there was a direct correlation between level of resource commitment and level of partner commitment.

33. Resource mobilization was also seen as a key partnership-building tool. Participants agreed that resource sustainability was a key concern for all partners from an early stage of the partnership cycle. Key elements discussed included:

- Investing partner time in scoping, partnership-building and partner reviews.
- Having all partners make tangible resource commitments.
- Putting a value on all non-financial resources.
- Using non-financial resource commitments to leverage financial resources.
- Drawing resources from multiple sources (thereby reducing dependency on one source).
- Acknowledging all resource contributions.

34. While partnerships often take the form of voluntary arrangements, with more informal structures, there is a growing need for evaluation and monitoring of partnerships — both internally and externally. A variety of tools and methods were discussed and it was acknowledged that there were different beneficiaries of monitoring and evaluation (and this would determine the type of evaluation required). The raising of key issues indicated that:

- Timing/sequencing was a potential problem, as concerns were raised on the need to give partnerships enough time to work/deliver results.
- Determining appropriate indicators/measures was another concern. While for some partnerships, there existed quantifiable targets/milestones or other performance-based indicators, for other partnerships (for example, those with a goal of influencing policy), indicators were difficult to define.

- Funding partners/donors often required quantifiable results, in which case the partnership might require external evaluation.
- Reporting requirements were often seen as onerous and time-consuming, especially when the partnership was required to report on multiple levels, both internally and externally.

Partnerships exposition, Marrakech Place and other activities

35. In addition to the numerous workshops, panel discussions and breakout groups organized at the Forum, a number of other interactive elements were held during the Forum, namely:

- A partnerships exposition: this activity enabled partnerships to showcase their work: 16 different initiatives displayed posters and other materials, and distributed information related to their partnership.
- Marrakech Place: this innovative element of the Forum programme was organized to facilitate networking and strengthen new and existing partnerships. Key features included:
  - "Ask an Expert": 10 experts (3 water experts, 2 energy experts and 5 partnering process experts) were available for one-on-one direct interaction, to answer specific partnerships-related questions. Forum participants had the option of either scheduling appointments or simply dropping by for consultations.
  - "On-demand" facilitated workshops: Forum participants had the opportunity to create workshops on topics of their choice with experienced facilitators who had agreed to volunteer their time and services. Five workshops were organized on topics ranging from information systems for partnerships communication to the proposed establishment of a sustainable development institute for Africa.
- Informal workshops and partnerships meetings: the World Business Council for Sustainable Development organized a workshop on the role of business in public-private partnerships. A number of partnerships also used the opportunity afforded by the Forum to convene informal partnerships meetings on the margins.

Conclusions

36. Partnerships are delivering results on the ground and at the same time helping to effect change at a systemic level by catalysing government action, engaging new stakeholders, and creating new, innovative models for implementation of sustainable development goals.

37. A recurring message from participants was that each partnership was unique and each initiative had its own process. Flexibility is key to effective partnerships: "one size does not fit all". There is a great deal of diversity in design, membership, objectives and governance structures within the various partnerships working in the areas of water and energy.

38. A key element of the partnerships model is stakeholder engagement. These collaborative initiatives are an acknowledgement of the principle that the "sum of the parts is greater than the whole" and that by pooling interests and resources, partnerships can accomplish goals that a single organization could not achieve on its own. Within the area of stakeholder engagement, there is a need for both top-down and bottom-up processes, in other words, leadership at all levels. There is a particular need to engage the private sector especially for service delivery and technological know-how, and the poorest of the poor, as they are key end-users. This goal will require clear incentives and imaginative engagement strategies. All stakeholders need to be clear about what they are bringing to the table in order to create an "enabling environment" for deals, and to foster the realization that every partner is both a beneficiary and a donor.

39. Partnerships practitioners stressed that there are no short cuts in forming effective partnerships. Some described partnership-building as more of an art than a science. To have effective partnerships with long-term value requires up-front investment of time and resources in building the partnership and regular reviews to assess whether the partnership is truly equitable, transparent and mutually beneficial.

40. The Marrakech Forum was seen as an important milestone in the dialogue on partnerships for sustainable development. It was also a valuable opportunity for water and energy partnerships to showcase their results to an international audience. Participants expressed the hope that this reflective process would continue and that discussions on partnerships at other forums would reflect the partnership principles of inclusiveness, transparency and participation.

41. The present outcome document of the Forum will be presented at the beginning of the thirteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (New York, 11-22 April 2005).

Notes

[a] *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

[b] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

[c] General Assembly resolution S-19/2, annex.